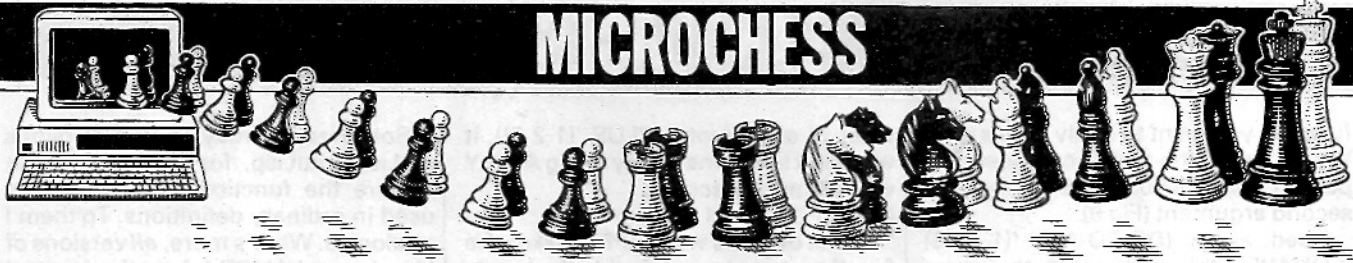


## MICROCHESS



# Look back in dismay

*The World Microcomputer Chess Championship held recently in Glasgow was full of surprises, as Tony Harrington found out.*

Looking back with hindsight at the predictions I made about the likely outcome of the 4th World Microcomputer Chess Championship (WMCC), I find many reasons for dropping the prediction-making habit as quickly as possible (see October PCW). This World Championship was full of surprises.

The first of these concerned those who weren't there at the off. The Novag Super Constellation was many people's idea of a hot favourite prior to the event. It had beaten all kinds of international masters at blitz chess and had acquired a great reputation in the process. Surely Novag would want to cash in on its potential and claim a WMCC title. But no, instead of an entry form, Novag sent round a circular to everyone except the organisers a week or two before the tournament, stating why these kinds of events are not worth entering.

In golf that would be called playing the percentage shot: if you have a good reputation already, why risk blowing it? However, that wasn't one of Novag's reasons for not entering. It was worried about the absence of any reliable test to differentiate between a genuine 'commercial entry' and something running on equipment way out of reach of most people's pockets. That sounds a reasonable grumble, but it has more to do with marketing nerves than reality. I still think the Super Constellation might have won if it had been allowed a chance (another prediction, but habits are hard to break).

SciSys was a less surprising absence. Nothing had been said before the tournament about a real improvement in the SciSys Superstar program. The word from SciSys was that it was working on one but that it would not be ready in time for the event.

Even with these two manufacturers out of the running, the field was one of the largest ever with nineteen entries beginning and — even more remark-

ably — finishing the tournament (despite the occasional threat of a walk out, a normal occurrence at these events).

Far and away the most astonishing thing about the tournament, from my point of view, was the reappearance of Conchess, which had three entries. Ulf Rathsmann, the programmer, had been quietly beaver away since Conchess's rather undistinguished initial public performance at the 1982 PCW tournament, and had come up with a program capable of testing the best.

Then there was the Mephisto team, also with three entries. Mephisto had drawn some flak over the last year for releasing a Mephisto III which had the unfortunate habit of losing to the earlier Mephisto II. (New releases are supposed to be better than the old, rather than just different.) So it was nice to see that Hegener and Glazer, the supplier, appeared to have some improvements to offer.

Fidelity, as usual, had a strong array of entries, supplemented by a number of Spracklen programs running on business computers like the Compaq, the Macintosh and the Apple. Intelligent Software entered an experimental program and — good news for home computer owners — Richard Lang and Martin Bryant, two regular participants in what used to be the annual PCW European Tournaments, also had entries.

Lang's Cyrus program, available in one form or another on both the Spectrum and the Dragon, was replaced for this event by a new generation program designed for the Sinclair QL. Sponsored by Psion, which will be marketing it in the UK, Lang's program (called Psion after the sponsor, undoubtedly a wise decision) ran, for the purposes of the tournament, on an 8MHz Sage computer. It will, he reckons, be slower by a factor of three on the QL, but even so, it looks like being one of the strongest home computer prog-

rams around. Lang won joint first prize in a four-way tie for first place. This earned him a large bottle of Lang's Whisky (though he assures us he is not related).

Bryant's home computer program for the BBC Model B, White Knight Mk 10, won the 'Best home computer chess program' section at the 1983 PCW tournament. Bryant improved on White Knight with a program called Colossus, which has done very well as a commercial program for the Commodore 64 (see November PCW). For this event, he entered a souped-up version of Colossus, running on an Apple II.

Last but not least, there was the solitary amateur entry, Geoff Bulmer's 'Chessnut', a plucky little program running on a Commodore 64 and guaranteed of the best amateur trophy even if it didn't win a game (it didn't).

The seven-round Swiss tournament was held in Glasgow at the Stakis Ingrim Hotel (9 to 15 September) as part of the centenary celebrations of the Scottish Chess Association. Sponsored by CGL Ltd and Langs Supreme Whisky, in association with Stakis Hotels PLC, my main concern is that unless the Scots feel like an early celebration, we might have to wait another hundred years for a micro tournament to be as well organised and presented.

From the opening ceremony to the grand buffet close, it was a splendidly organised and run event.

Rounds began at 2pm each day and went through to a *theoretical* 10pm close. I say theoretical because the tournament director, Mike Valvo, a US International Master, made a practice of allowing play to go on where necessary until the computers either bored their programmers to death or reached a result. If there was the smallest sign of theoretical interest left in the game, he was willing to pace the floor and let the machines fight it out. Even when the programmers themselves wanted to

### Game No 1 Sargon Compaq versus Mephisto B

1 Nf3 d5	20 Nxd2 Qe2
2 g3 Nc6	21 Rfd1 Bh5
3 Bg2 e5	22 f3 Ne5
4 d3 Nf6	23 g4 Nxg4
5 0-0 Bf5	24 fxg4 Bxg4
6 Bd2 Bc5	25 Qa3 Rxd2
7 b4 Nxb4	26 Rxd2 Qxd2
8 Nxe5 Qd6	27 h3 Qd4+
9 Bc3 0-0	28 Kh1 Bd7
10 Nd2 Rf-e8	29 a5 Bc6
11 e4 dxe4	30 a6 b5
12 Nec4 Qa6	31 Rb1 Bxe4
13 Bxf6 Qxf6	32 Qb3 Bxg2+
14 dxe4 Bg6	33 Kh2 Bc6
15 Rb1 Qa6	34 Kg3 Re2
16 a3 Nc6	35 Qf3 Bxf3
17 a4 Bb4	36 Rf1 Qe5+
18 Ra1 Rad8	37 Kxf3 Qe4+
19 Qc1 Bxd2	38 Kg3 Rg2 mate 0-1

This was one of the better games from the tournament. The manner in which Mephisto forces the win is particularly impressive.

### Game No 2 Intelligent Chess Software (ICS) versus Chessnut

1 d4 d5	9 f3 Bh5	17 Qc6 Rd1+
2 c4 Nc6	10 Qb3 b6	18 Kxd1 Kd8
3 Nc3 dxc4	11 Qa4+ Qd7	19 Nxc7 Bf7
4 d5 Ne5	12 Bb5 0-0-0	20 Kc2 Kc8
5 Nf3 f6	13 Qxe7 Qxb5	21 Na6+ Kd8
6 Nxe5 fxe5	14 Nxh5 Nxd5	22 Rd1+ Bd5
7 e4 Nf6	15 Qa8+ Kd7	23 Rxd5 mate
8 Bxc4 Bg4	16 Qxd5+ Kc8	24 0-1

Although ICS didn't do well overall, it was quite up to exploiting a poor opening by Chessnut.

call things a draw Valvo was heard to say: 'Let's give it 10 more moves and see what happens ...'

The chess played was definitely of a higher standard this year than ever before, but you would have been hard pressed to spot that from most of the games scores.

Computers, even good ones, play boring chess against each other; they look much more impressive against chess players, when the game takes on more shape and sharpness.

But although it didn't lead to much in the way of spectacular middle game works or witty sacrificial attacks, the increased strength of many of the participants showed up in the large number of end games that were reached (see Games section).

Another indication of the strength of the event is that Martin Bryant's Colossus—which I have always thought of as a rather good program—could only scrape up one and a half points against the dedicated machines.

And L'Empereur, an old Intelligent Software program which tied for first commercial place in the 1982 PCW Tournament, entered here by its French manufacturer, could do no better.

Caithness Glass bowls were presented to the four winners by Professor Monroe Newbarn, president of the ICCA. The actual title of commercial world champion, though, went to the Mephisto A, since it was the only machine among the winners which fulfilled the condition of being currently available in the shops.

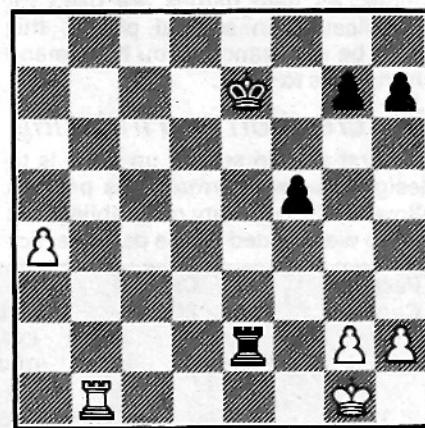
The Fidelity Elegance ran at 6.1MHz on a 6502 processor, the Mephisto

programs at 12MHz on a 68000 and PrinChess (or Conchess) at 6.1MHz on a 6502 chip. Full tournament bulletins are available from Chess Suppliers (Scotland) Ltd, 15 Hope St, Glasgow G2.

## Games section

**White: Fidelity Elite X. Black: Mephisto B. Notes by Grandmaster Dr John Nunn**

(The 4th World Microcomputer Chess Championship was notable for the close finish and for the surprising number of interesting end games arising. The reason for this is probably that the struggle between the stronger programs created today is likely to remain finely balanced for a long time. The following fascinating ending was of some sporting interest since the Fidelity Elite X needed to win against Mephisto B to tie for first. We take up the story with the Elite, as White, about to make its 43rd move.)



43 Rb1-a1!

(Although material is level, White has all the chances because the passed a-pawn can be used to deflect Black's pieces from the defence of his kingside pawns. White correctly places his rook behind the pawn to support its advance.)

43 ... Ke7-d6

(Black later decides to blockade the pawn with his rook in any case, so it would have been better to do this immediately by 43 ... Re2-e6 44 a4-a5 Re6-a6.)

44 a4-a5 Kd6-c7

45 a5-a6 Re2-e8

(Black would have preferred to use his king to obstruct the pawn's advance by 45 ... Kc7-b8 46 a6-a7+ Kb8-a8, so as to leave the rook actively placed, but White can play 45 ... Kc7-b8 46 Ra1-b1+! followed by RB1-b7 attacking the kingside pawns.)

46 Ra1-b1?

(Giving Black unnecessary chances. 46 a6-a7 Re8-a8 47 Kg1-f2 Kc7-b7 48 Kf2-f3 Ra8xa7 49 Ra1xa7+ Kb7xa7 50 Kf3-f4 Ka7-b6 51 Kf4xf5 Kb6-c7 52 Kf5-e6 followed by Ke6-f7 wins the kingside pawns. We shall meet several lines in which the rooks are exchanged, when the result depends on whether White's king can penetrate to attack the g7 and h7 pawns before Black's king

comes to the rescue. Here the result is as close as it could be, depending on a single move.)

46 ... Re8-b8

(46 ... g7-g6 47 Rb1-b7+ Kc7-c6 48 Rb7xh7 Re8-e1+ 49 Kg1-f2 Re1-a1 was no better because of the strong reply 50 Rh7-h6!.)

47 Rb1-e1?

(Missing 47 Rb1xb8 Kc7xb8 48 Kg1-f2 winning as before.)

47 ... Kc7-d6

48 a6-a7 Rb8-a8

(White reverts to the correct plan. Black's rook is completely immobilised, so White has time to bring up his king.)

49 ... g7-g6

50 h2-h3 Kd6-c7

51 g2-g4?

(This should have thrown away the win, which could have been forced by the familiar plan of 51 Kg1-f2 followed by a king advance.)

52 ... f5xg4

52 h3xg4 Kc7-b7

(Now we can see the difference. Thanks to the pawn exchange Black can meet 53 Kg1-f2 by 53 ... Ra8xa7 54 Ra1xa7+ Kb7xa7 55 Kf2-f3 h7-h5 exchanging White's last pawn and drawing.)

53 Ra1-b1+ Kb7-c6

(Black could also have taken the pawn, but he has not spoilt anything yet.)

54 Rb1-a1 Kc6-b6

55 Ra1-b1+ Kb7xa7

56 Kg1-f2

(White is in no danger of losing despite his minus pawn, since Black's king is too far away, but equally he should not win.)

56 ... Ra8-f8+

57 Kf2-g3 Rf8-f7

(57 ... h7-h5 was the simplest draw.)

58 g4-g5 Rf7-f5

59 Kg3-g4 Ka7-a6

60 Rb1-d1 Rf5-f7

61 Rd1-b1 Rf7-b7??

(Mephisto's blunder allows the Elite X to take joint first place. Black only needed to mark time by 61 ... Ka6-a7 to draw, since White cannot undertake anything positive.)

62 Rb1xb7! Ka6xb7

(White's king is able to win both Black pawns and reach a won position with king and pawn vs king.)

63 Kg4-f4 Kb7-c6

64 Kf4-e5 Kc6-c5

65 Ke5-f6 Kc5-d4

(Or 65 ... Kc5-d6 66 Kf6-g7 Kd6-e7 67 Kg7xh7 Ke7-f7 68 Kh7-h6 Kf7-f8 69 Kh6xg6 Kf8-g8 70 Kg6-f6 Kg8-f8 71 g5-g6 Kf8-g8 72 g6-g7 Kg8-h7 73 Kf6-f7 and the pawn promotes to a queen.)

66 Kf6-g7 Kd4-e4

67 Kg7xh7 Ke4-f5

68 Kh7-h6 Kf5-e5

(Black has no choice but to abandon his last pawn to its fate.)

69 Kh6xg6 Ke5-e6

70 Kg6-h7 Ke6-d5

71 g5-g6 Kd5-e6

72 g6-g7

(and Black resigned.)

END